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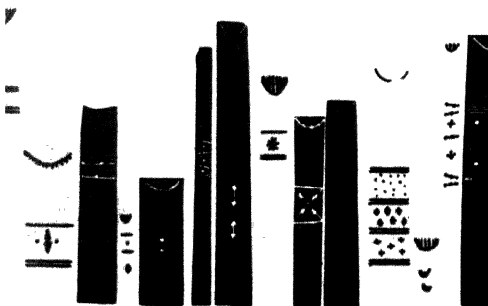
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The French cathedrals,  
their symbolic  
[c1931]







THE FRENCH CATHEDRALS  
*Their Symbolic Significance*



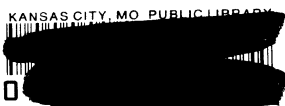




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*To My Children:  
Jacques and Jacqueline Fouré*





## *Preface*

PRINTING was unknown at the time when the cathedrals were built.

The necessary facts which the rich and the poor must know were represented on the stone portals, the painted walls, and the stained glass windows of their churches. Hence the symbolic significance of the cathedral.

The people of the Middle Ages understood the meaning of the sculptures and paintings; they knew about the lives of the men and women of stone. Can we, people of a different age, read and understand that most complex and immortal book: a cathedral?

True, when we enter the nave the sublimity of its lofty vertical lines reacts upon our soul and purifies it; but why should we be satisfied with an impression and not try to decipher this mass of signs and symbols? Why should we remain ignorant?

The writer of this introduction, when acting as an interpreter with the armies in Picardy, was asked by the British authorities to lecture in Amiens Cathedral, whose name is so well known among English people and on which the great master John Ruskin wrote that remarkable book which he so fittingly called "The Bible of Amiens." Her audiences were so interested and left the church with such a comprehension of the beautiful symbols which had always before appeared to them as magnificent but meaningless ornaments, that

she was induced to sum her lectures up in this short **and** simple book which, she sincerely hopes, will encourage English-speaking people to study, therefore to love, that most magnificent and perfect work of art: the French cathedral.

HÉLÈNE FOURÉ



MAP SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHICAL  
POSITION OF THE CITIES



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## Foreword

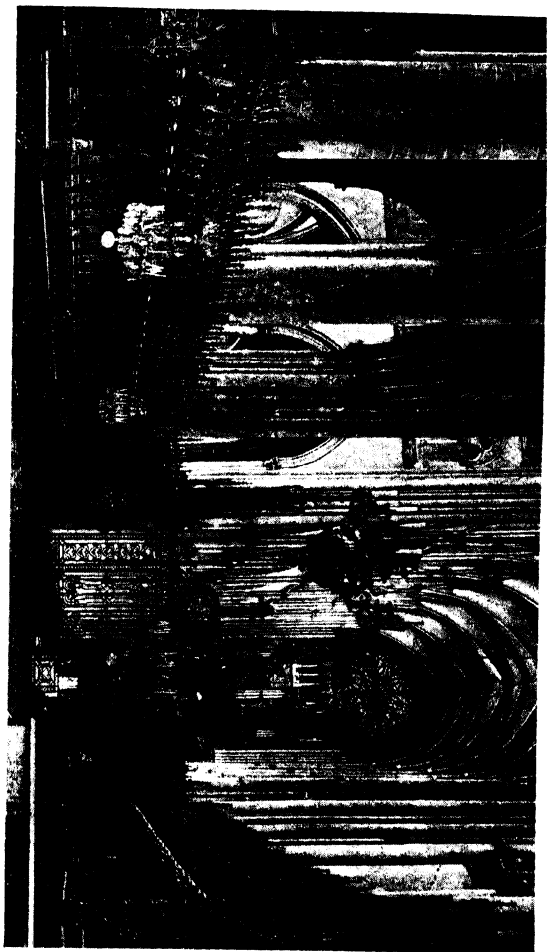
I HAVE read with much interest the manuscript of Madame Fouré's book which treats of the symbolism of French cathedrals. It is true that the eye can bring of itself only what it has the capacity to see. How little of the true meaning of this mass of symbolism, carved in everlasting stone through the patient toil of the workman, is understood by the casual tourist! He imagines that he has seen a world-famed cathedral, the name of which has been familiar from childhood days, but in reality he has *not* seen it. Each carved stone would speak to him, but he cannot hear its message.

Madame Fouré brings to the reader an understanding of the meaning often concealed in fantastic forms from gargoyles to sculptured saints. She does not fail to point out the painstaking care bestowed upon the task even where it was certain that the part would never be seen by human eye. The sculptor was fashioning for the ages, and long after the hand that toiled so patiently has mouldered into dust we stand in reverence before the revelation of the yearning of the soul to express the mysteries of God.

The writer of this brief commendatory was once attending a service in the Cathedral at Syracuse in Sicily, built on the site of an old Greek temple. On the north and on the south are still seen the original Doric columns of the ancient shrine, twenty-eight feet in height and over six feet in diameter. The *naos*, which marked the divine pres-

ence within the temple, must have occupied the place where now the altar stands. In the shadow of these stately pillars Greek and Christian have offered up their prayers for nearly twenty-five centuries. How close this brings us to the heart of humanity! Blocks of stone and sculptured forms, though mute, yet speak to us from out the years.

H. C. TOLMAN



THE INTERIOR OF THE CATHEDRAL AT AMIENS

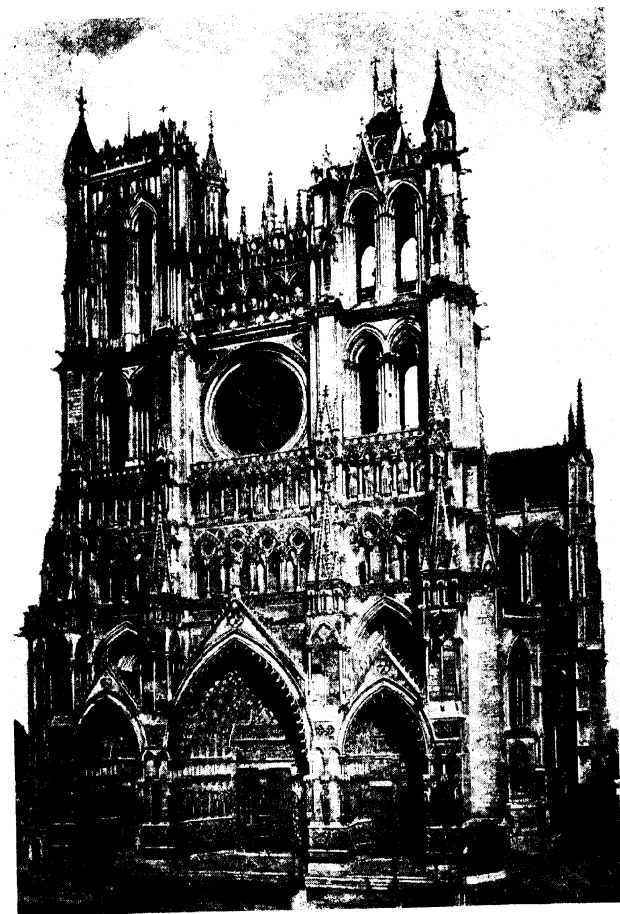


THE FRENCH CATHEDRALS  
*Their Symbolic Significance*









THE CATHEDRAL AT AMIENS

## CHAPTER I

### *The Origin of the French Cathedral*

TWO great events, the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, and the peace granted to the Church by the Edict of Milan, were chiefly responsible for the erection of beautiful stone churches in Italy. At that time the Kingdom of the Franks, still half uncivilized, began to give a great number of converts to the new religion; but for a long time they were unable to build anything like what the Romans had built.

The very first oratories were of wood, but these wooden buildings were not very practical, since they were frequently destroyed by fire, either accidentally, or maliciously, by the enemies of the new religion. The Visigoths were the first of the tribes to build their churches of stone; but as they were able neither to build anything which could equal the wonderful churches or temples of Rome and Greece, of which they were ignorant, nor find a way of supporting the thrust of the vaults, they erected very low buildings with thick walls and pillars.

One of the first churches built of stone was that of St. Ouen, at Rouen, (657). It was made of roughly hewn stone and was considered at that time a remarkable masterpiece. Until the eleventh century most of the stone churches were massive and rough in their appearance, in fact very much like the faith of the people of that time.

Little by little the wooden churches disappeared,

for although wood may be used for building the house of man, the house of God must be permanent and must testify to God the faith of man, revealing to the new generations the faith of the old.

Moreover, the Church became continually more important in the life of the Franks. Clovis, one of the first Merovingian kings, was baptized at Rheims in 490, and his example was followed by his people. The support that he gave to the bishops increased their influence, and gradually the Christian religion became the religion of all the Franks. The Catholics looked upon the Frankish king as the elect of God, he was surrounded by monks and bishops, and Pope Anatase called him the Eldest Son of the Church. Thus France seemed to become an immense sanctuary; chapels, oratories, churches, cathedrals, convents seemed to spring up out of the ground to flourish and spread their influence over the country.

At the time of the barbarian invasions, many of the bishops were given temporal and civil authority over the towns in which they resided, and a great many of these cities made their bishops the heads of the city administration. When now the feudal lords took advantage of their privileges, the Church created the Truce of God and Chivalry to alleviate the misfortune of the people and to protect the weak. This Truce of God, which granted perpetual peace to women, children, and field-laborers, was enforced in France about 1040. The lords were forbidden to fight from Wednesday evening till the next Tuesday morning, during Advent and Lent.

The masses in those days knew only what the Church taught them; their hope was for the better

world which religion promised them. Faith became more and more eager. This was especially the case at the time of the Crusades, and our most beautiful churches date from that period.

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The word "Cathedral" was applied only to a church that was the seat of a bishop. There was only one cathedral in each diocese, and it was not merely a place of worship but also a building where business and public affairs were discussed, and thus it came to play a great part in the political life of the French. It was there that people were accustomed to come to pray; it was there that they would listen to those "Mysteries" which were in modern times the very first dramas, performed at first in the cathedral itself and later on the parvis.

The cathedral was built in the middle of the town with the houses clustered closely about it and the enormous structure dominated the plain as if to extend its protection over the surrounding country. No matter where built, it could be seen from a great distance, reminding every one of the presence of God, because, for the people of the Middle Ages, the cathedral was first of all the house of God. It was for God that they had built it, sparing neither labor nor money, thinking that nothing was too beautiful for Him who created them and died to save them. Men, women, children, rich and poor, helped in the erection of the cathedral, either with personal work or with gifts. It is difficult for us to realize the amount of work and money which was needed for the construction of such buildings, the foundations of which alone took many years, so that those who saw the beginning of the building

never saw its completion. In many cases after the church was fairly begun, work would come to a standstill owing to a war or lack of money, to be resumed, perhaps, later, as soon as conditions permitted.

In order to raise the funds necessary for the erection, collections were taken in the churches as well as in the streets, where pageants, with a display of relics of saints, would be produced solely for that purpose.

Often the windows of some of the chapels were donated by individuals or by corporations, every one doing his best, and hoping that God, the God for whom that wonderful house was erected, would not forget those who had toiled for its glory.

Moreover the Church was rich at that time, for during the preceding centuries she had received donations from the faithful, and Charlemagne had made an obligation of the "tithe," that is to say, a tax amounting to one-tenth of the products of the crops, payable to the clergy. However, the Crusades were a heavy drain upon her resources.

## CHAPTER II

### *Evolution of Architecture*

#### THE NORMAN PERIOD

ONLY a few cathedrals were built before the year 1000, and various influences are noticeable in these first buildings. Up to the twelfth century the style is Norman, with sometimes a reminiscence of either the Byzantine or the Romanesque style of architecture, depending upon the part of France in which they were built.

If at the present time one visits the old French churches in the south of France he finds that they are essentially Norman: round arches, short pillars and bell turrets prevail. The chief characteristic of these churches is the vault or the arch having the shape of a semicircle, which rests on columns that are generally short and bulky, ending in large capitals with heavy pillars or counterforts which rise up to the edge of the roof. In some places, especially in the central part of France, at Périgueux and Le Puy, the churches are crowned with cupolas; the windows are few and small and consequently the interior of the church is very dark. However, the interior of the building is often very elaborate, with paintings and frescoes, representing the lives of the saints. Outside, on the portal are decorations, carved in the stone, which were originally painted and gilded. Those of the following period were all painted and gilded, as can still be seen when they have not been destroyed by the ravages of time or man.

Norman architecture reached its climax during the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, and during this period the churches of St. Trophine at Arles, St. Servin at Toulouse, Notre Dame at Le Puy, St. Front at Périgueux, St. Pierre at Angoulême, the Abaye-aux-Hommes at Caen, and Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers were built. The last named is especially famous for its magnificent façade, which is entirely covered with sculptures and decorations. Those sculptures appeared only at the end of the eleventh century when the crusaders brought from the East new ideas and numerous patterns of sculptures. The artists then kept the French ideas as far as statues were concerned, but copied the decorations of the East.

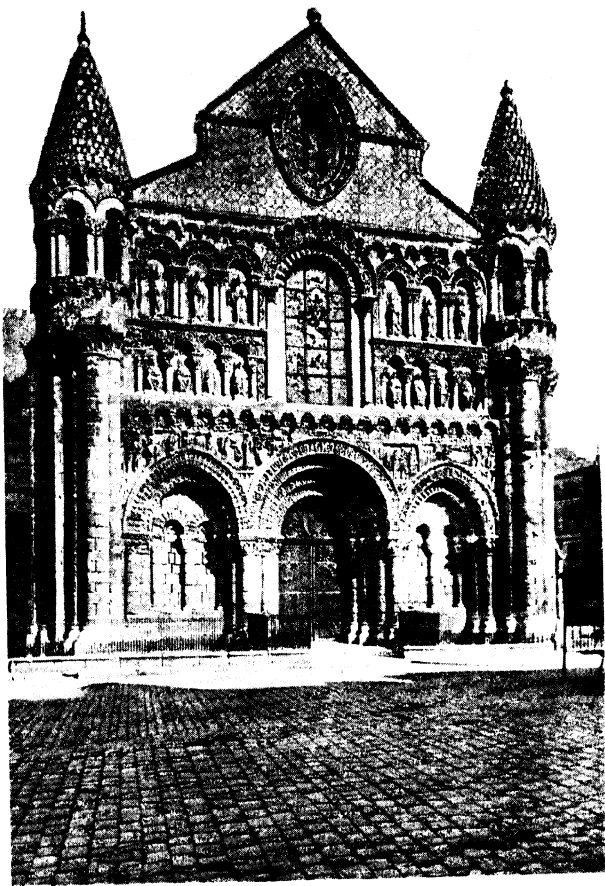
#### THE GOTHIC PERIOD: ITS DIFFERENT STYLES

If one travels from the south to the north of France one notices that the column becomes higher and higher and the dome is changed into a vaulted roof, and, most characteristic of all, the arch becomes an ogive.

##### **First Period.**

That Gothic arch dates back from the early years of the reign of Louis-le-Gros, as well as the reappearance of the antique column and the enlarged windows. The cathedrals of Laon, 1160; Noyon, 1140, and St. Denis, 1140, were built during this reign.

The construction of the basilica of St. Denis by Suger, a minister of the king of France, had a decided influence on the national architecture. It was the first transitional building between the



NOTRE DAME LA GRANDE: POITIERS





Norman and the Gothic. Its beauty and its importance made it famous, and it became a model for the construction of the churches in the central part of France.

To the first Gothic period belong also the large church of St. Leu in the Valley of the Oise, the choir of St. Germain-des-Prés, the choir of Notre Dame, and the cathedrals of Lisieux and Sens. The architect of the last, Guillaume, was called to England in order to rebuild the Cathedral of Canterbury.

### **Second Period.**

The second period of Gothic architecture begins in 1190. The arches now become more pointed. The ribs of the Gothic vaulting, the piers that receive their downward thrust, the flying buttresses that take up and neutralize the horizontal thrust, form a pyramidal skeleton that would stand uninjured if the walls and vaulting were removed. In building the church at that time the flying buttress was regularly employed, the column replaced the Romanesque piers, vaults were made higher and perfected in structure, but the style was at the beginning plain and severe. Later the Gothic ornament appeared as a system, to express in tracery, in stained glass, in floral and vegetable ornament an encyclopedic series of figured sculptures that made the church as interpreted by mediæval minds a mirror of the universe; pillars and arches were decorated; small columns, bell turrets and gargoyles were added to the buildings. Some of these gargoyles are really worthy of admiration. They have their history, as has everything in the cathedral. According to a legend, the gargoyle was a

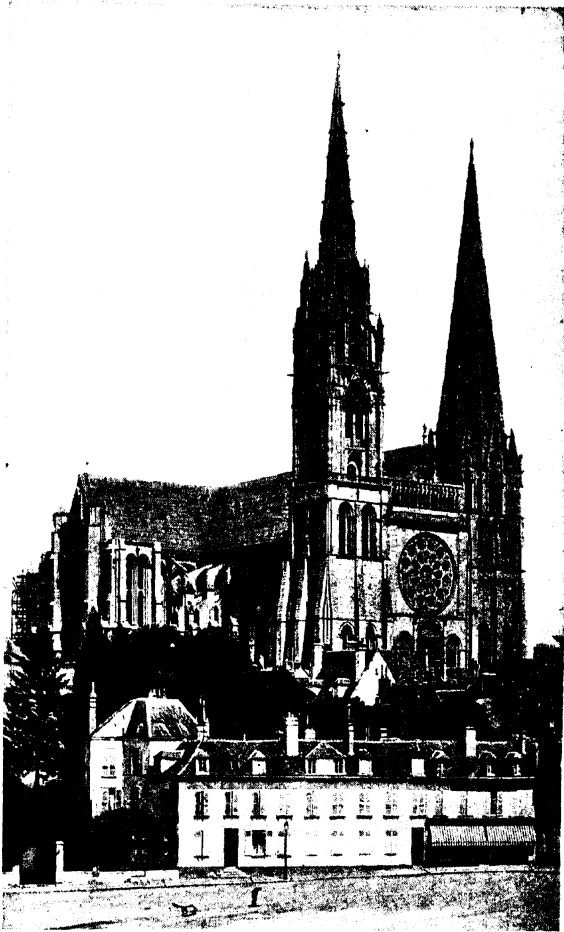
monster born of the mud of the Seine, which devastated the banks of the river. The bishop of Rouen, St. Romain, succeeded in overcoming and putting it to death; it was the symbol of Evil and Sin, which are overcome by Faith. Later those gargoyles, as well as the dragons and other monsters, had human faces, which were satirical representations of people.

The triforium was built very narrow, and in many cases it became only a narrow passage. The buildings now became higher and the arches of the vaults which rested on the capitals were continued, in the form of small columns, to the base of the big pillar. The windows were made even larger and the rose windows made their appearance with their magnificent stained glass. At this time the building of cathedrals had apparently become a necessity. It was a period of burning faith; the time of the Crusades, when more than ever the people relied on the Church. Chartres, Bourges, Troyes, Auxerre, Amiens, Beauvais were built.

From the architectural point of view Amiens was perfect and could be taken as a model; the architect desired to improve upon Amiens, but he did not succeed. In comparing the two cathedrals, Beauvais and Amiens, it seems as if the cathedral of Amiens were built for the glory of God, and Beauvais for the glory of man.

### **Third Period.**

Towards 1250 the structure of the church was nothing but a skeleton framing vast empty spaces. Chapels built on each side of the nave and round the choir hid heavy pillars; the Galilean chapel, dedicated to the Virgin, and called "la Chapelle de



CHARTRES CATHEDRAL.



la Vierge," became a miniature church inside the large one; the decoration of the steeple and of the portals was richer and expressed more life. Within, the columns became clusters of small columns, each of which corresponds to the moulding of the arches; the windows were more and more numerous, and could be seen all along the triforium; the large windows became still larger, and rose windows, trefoils, and quatrefoils were added.

In Notre Dame de Paris may be found the three different styles of Gothic architecture. The choir and the two upper galleries belong to the first period, or early Gothic; the other parts of the nave, the west font, to the second period; the chapels built along the nave, the north and south doors, belong to a later period. These different styles are in perfect harmony, and make Notre Dame interesting for connoisseurs.

In the fifteenth century began the decline of Gothic architecture. Exaggeration resulted in quaint, distorted, whimsical curves and a superabundance of lines.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Erection of the Cathedral*

IN THE beginning, all the cathedrals had been built by learned monks, but after the Communal Revolution art was no longer the monopoly of the clergy, and there was usually a master who was responsible for the harmony of the general work, although his name has sometimes been forgotten. Pierre de Montreuil built the Sainte Chapelle. Robert de Luzarches and Master Thomas de Cormont built the Cathedral of Amiens.

In building the first cathedrals the clergy had in view the education of the people. At that time the masses knew nothing but what the priest taught from the pulpit, so the clergy desired the church to be a book of stone where man would see the representation of what the minister of God had taught them; where all they had read or heard would be represented in such manner as to be ever before their minds. So in the cathedral the aim of all the decorations was to teach some religious truth. Every sign should be studied, every representation should have its own meaning, which was always to be the same; nobody would be allowed to change it, everybody would recognize it and know it. The meaning of the work was not so well defined in the sixteenth century; later it would be forgotten and even misunderstood. After a few centuries the symbolism of the Gothic architecture

was lost to men. Fortunately it was later studied and again understood.\*

From the point of view of architecture also everything was worked out for definite and special purposes; everything had its use and its significance.

\*The book of Emile Mâle, "L'Art religieux du XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle en France," is a thorough and very interesting study on the subject and we found in it much of the information given in this work.



## CHAPTER IV

### *The Plan of the Cathedral*

THE Gothic cathedral has the shape of a cross; the Cross, the symbol of Christianity; the Cross, the sign of salvation; the Cross, which held the Creator of life. For these reasons it is inside the Cross of the Church that the sinner will find again Life, Hope, and Forgiveness.

At the entrance of the cathedral stand the Apostles, the Prophets, the Saints and the Virgin. It is through them, if we follow their example, that we shall enter the Kingdom of God. Christ himself is represented on the pier of the west porch. In Amiens, the expression and holy beauty of the representation is striking. Christ is there, treading on the lion and the dragon, images of Sin. His right hand is raised in blessing, His left hand holding the New Testament. Around Him are representations of the months, signs of the zodiac, the Virtues and the Vices. One realizes that He is the center of everything as well as the one who opens to all the door of the house of God.

The cathedral extends from east to west. The East is the direction of the sunrise, the direction of Bethlehem, where Christ was born and from which life and the light of truth have spread over the whole world. That is why the priest faces the East when officiating. The West, where the sun sets, signifies the close of the day; it is also the symbol of the end of life. The great portal faces west and

it is on its tympanum that the Last Judgment is represented. The artists of the Middle Ages liked to think that the last rays of the sunset would light the representation of the last day of the world.

The North is the region of cold and night; on the north porch are often found representations of the Old Testament, while the New Testament is represented on the south part of the church, the South being the region of sun and light.

The Middle Ages always considered Christ as the source of light and life, for all that came before Him is cold and dark, whereas all things coming from Him or after Him are full of life and light.

Inside the cathedral are the choir, the transept and the nave. In the choir is the altar where relics of martyrs and saints are often kept. Around the ambulatory are chapels, usually five or seven in number. The east chapel is dedicated to the Virgin, and is much larger and more beautiful than the others. In the third period of Gothic architecture chapels were built on both sides of the nave.

## CHAPTER V

### *Symbols*

IT HAS already been said that everything had its symbolic meaning. The mediæval idea was that the world itself was a symbol, that God had given a meaning to everything He created, that the world was a book full of truths that only the wise could understand. Since these symbols have a meaning which the artist could not change, the explanation of a few of them will help in the understanding of the sculptures and the windows.

The round nimbus is the sign of sanctity; the crucific nimbus, the sign of divinity; and the halo, the sign of eternal beatitude. God, Jesus Christ, the angels, and the apostles are the only persons represented with bare feet. A hand raised in benediction emerging from the clouds means the intervention of God. A tree or a stem with a few leaves, shows that the scene is taking place on earth. A few parallel horizontal lines indicate the sea, while a town is often represented by a tower with a door.

Everything is the symbolical representation of an idea. Very often Jesus Christ is represented surrounded by the lion, the eagle, the calf and the winged man; they represent the four evangelists. The winged man represents St. Matthew, because he began his gospel by giving a genealogy of the ancestors of Christ. The lion represents St. Mark, who began his gospel by speaking of the voice



## CHRIST AT CHARTRES

SURROUNDED BY THE LION, THE WINGED MAN, THE EAGLE, AND THE CALF



heard in the desert. The calf is St. Luke, who commenced with the sacrifice offered by Zacharias. The eagle is St. John, who speaks of the Divinity, and like the eagle can look at the sun, the sun being Jesus himself. These animals are symbolical of Jesus, also. The man typifies the incarnation; the eagle, the ascension; the calf, the passion; the lion, the symbol of resurrection, based on the notion that young lions are born dead, but that after three days their sire comes and breathes life into them.

The phoenix and the pelican are also symbols of resurrection. People believed that the phoenix, burned in flames, would come back to life after three days, and that the pelican, after having killed his little ones, would bathe them in his blood and in three days restore them to life. The asp and the basilisk are also symbols; the asp is an image of the hardened sinner, owing to the belief that that animal was charmed by music and that, to avoid it, it would press one ear to the ground and stop up the other with its tail, like the sinner who will not listen to the words of God.

For several reasons the eagle is also the symbol of Jesus Christ. It is the only creature that looks straight at the sun without being dazzled by its great light; the one that can fly above all other birds and that takes its little ones on its wings to teach them, like Christ, who is the only one who may look God in the face, who rises above us all, who helps us, protects us, and will enable us to mount higher and higher if we follow Him and accept His help.

The dove is the symbol of simplicity. The snake is sometimes the picture of prudence. The owl represents the Jewish people; it sees in the dark only, and is dazzled by the light of the sun: so are the Jews who could not see the Lord.

Monsters, dragons, gargoyles, serpents are the images of evil; that is why one sees St. Romain overthrowing the gargoyle; St. George striking the dragon; St. Marcel, the serpent; examples of the saints victorious over the demon.

The wax candle is a symbol, the meaning of which varies according to whether it is lighted or not. The pure wax of the candle represents the pure body of Christ; the wick within symbolizes His soul, which is unseen, but from which shines most sublime light; the brilliance of the candle flame proclaims the divinity of Christ. When not lighted, it is a symbol of the Old Testament and typifies also the dark pillar which led the Hebrews through the desert during the day, but when lighted it is the symbol of the New Testament and represents the pillar of fire which led the Hebrews through the night.

The artists liked order and symmetry. Every sculpture placed under a statue has some connection with it. The apostles stand upon the kings who persecuted them; Moses upon the golden calf; Jesus upon the asp and the basilisk. The virtues are opposed to the vices. The twelve prophets of the Old Testament are represented with the twelve apostles of the New, and the four great prophets with the four evangelists. On a portal at Chartres Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Jeremiah are even represented carrying on their shoulders the four evan-



MONSTERS AT NOTRE DAME: PARIS





gelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John. We must understand by this that the words of the evangelists were based on the words of the prophets, but that the former could see above and beyond the latter.

Numbers are also symbolic: three is the symbol of the Trinity, and for that reason is the symbol of the soul and of all spiritual things. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Four is the symbol of the elements: water, fire, air, earth. For that reason four is the symbol of material things and of everything which results from the combination of those elements. There are four seasons, four points of the compass, four evangelists and four prophets.

The two numbers, seven and twelve, which are formed by the addition and by the multiplication of three and four, are always found. There are twelve prophets, twelve apostles, twelve months, twelve signs of the zodiac; in the churches there are twelve crosses of dedication sculptured or painted on twelve of the columns inside the church; they are the symbol of the twelve apostles who have really built the Church of Christ and on whose teaching rests the whole Church. In the Ste. Chapelle, in Paris, that idea has been even better interpreted by representing each of the apostles holding the cross in his hand, and standing beside a column of dedication.

The number seven is the symbol of the union of the soul and body; life is divided into seven ages; there are seven virtues; seven vices; seven sacraments; seven sciences; seven days; seven planets known in those times.

Eight is the number of the new life. After the first life, represented by seven, is over, life begins again; it is the symbol of resurrection. That is why out of ninety baptismal fonts kept from the Middle Ages, we find sixty-seven having the form of an octagon. The sinner being baptized leaves behind his first life in order to follow the law of God; eight is the symbol of regeneration.

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Encyclopedia: the "Speculum Majus"*

SEVERAL encyclopedias were written during the mediæval period, among which the most remarkable was the "Speculum Majus," by Vincent de Beauvais. It was the book which had the greatest influence on the mediæval mind, and also on the building of the cathedrals erected after his famous book appeared.

Vincent de Beauvais was a Dominican, tutor to St. Louis's children, and librarian of the king. Extremely clever and learned, he tried to classify human knowledge at the beginning of the thirteenth century. His work shows great learning and his method is so perfect that the Middle Ages could not improve upon it. Even today, when we wish to understand the spirit of that period, we can find no better work than the "Speculum Majus" of Vincent de Beauvais, clearly divided into four mirrors: (1) Mirror of Nature; (2) Mirror of Science; (3) Mirror of Morals; (4) Mirror of History.

(1) **Mirror of Nature.** Vincent de Beauvais asserted that before the creation of the world God was alone. He wanted to be worshipped, loved, understood by His creatures, and so He created the angels. Vincent told all that he knew about God, His nature, His attributes, and the good and the bad angels. In the Mirror of Nature the author describes how God created heaven and earth, and thereupon launches out into a treatise on mineralogy, geography, astronomy. Earth produced

plants and fruits, hence we have a book on botany. Next he informs us that God created man, and sets forth a study of the body, the soul, and the different races of mankind. After the creation of Adam and Eve God rested. Vincent admires the order, the harmony of the universe, soon disturbed by the fall of man.

(2) **Mirror of Science.** But man can rise and advance through science, so the encyclopedia teaches him how to think, to reason, and to speak, and explains the other sciences, the application of which follows.

(3) **Mirror of Morals.** It is fitting that man should have knowledge, but he must also act, and act according to the divine law which reveals to man his duties by teaching him his virtues. He must believe, hope, and love; he must be chaste, humble, gentle, patient, sober, courageous, prudent. If he follows these righteous precepts he will be rewarded and he will deserve heaven. If he acts wrongly he will be chastised and will deserve hell.

(4) **Mirror of History.** As soon as man was born he acquired and increased his knowledge; he acted, he thought, he traced his own history from the fall of Adam to 1244. Then Vincent de Beauvais, like all the thinkers of the Middle Ages, prophesied the future and concluded the last part of his work with the end of the world, and the Last Judgment.

For him, and for all historians of that period, the history of humanity exists only as it is closely bound to that of God, and to that of the Church.

These divisions as conceived by Vincent de Beauvais, prevail in the general position of the statues in the Cathedral of Chartres.

All the artists of that time follow the examples of the doctors of the church, and express, on the stone, all the human sciences. For them human science is the history of the world, of its creation, of its relations with God.

In Chartres there are altogether 1816 statues. They form the beginning of the glorious history of modern sculpture, and certain work of that period can be compared favorably with that of the Renaissance.

Having explained the theory of Vincent de Beauvais in his "*Speculum Majus*," and having shown the meaning of each division, we shall now present the Vincent de Beauvais interpretation of the artistic decoration of our cathedrals.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Interpretation of the Mirror of Nature*

THE artists of the Middle Ages regarded the entire world as a symbol: God, who created man and the universe, desired the latter to serve as a teacher to the former. Thus we see examples and symbols in the cardinal points; in the sun, which is Jesus who enlightened the world, light is His teaching, night is the symbol of the world before His coming. The seasons have their meanings: winter, the period of cold and darkness, is the symbol of the ignorance of humanity before the birth of Christ—Jesus was born at the winter solstice, exactly at the period when the days are becoming longer and when light will reappear and increase daily; spring, which renews life in nature, is also the symbol of baptism, which gives a new life to man; summer is the symbol of charity which radiates over all the world and which causes growth; autumn, the time for harvest, is the symbol of the last judgment, when man will receive his due.

Even the elements are represented. We see them at Amiens on three magnificent windows: the southern window, of a gorgeous red color, made redder still by the rays of the sun, symbolizes the sun; the northern window, of a deep blue, symbolizes the sea; the western window, gray and blue, symbolizes the earth and the air. At Notre Dame, in Paris, the earth is represented as a sturdy

woman who offers her breast to a younger one, probably humanity. The sea is a young woman who is seated astride a fish and who holds a ship in her hand.

Sometimes the different regions of the world are represented. At Sens they appear in the form of animals, real or imaginary: the elephant is India; the griffin, the ostrich, the camel are Africa; the mermaid is the ocean.

The creations of nature, such as the fauna and flora, are represented in the cathedral and used in the decoration of the building; together with the usual well known symbolic representations will appear new and original fauna and flora.

The artists drew their material from various sources, but usually they copied the flora of the neighborhood with full play of imagination and art. True, some flowers and some leaves were chosen for their beauty, but these flowers will always be flowers of France, those the French people have always known, those they have gathered in the woods, along the banks of the rivers, in their gardens, never neglecting the humblest, for that humblest is indeed a thought of God, a creature of the Almighty, a worthy ornament of His house.

The cathedral is therefore a part of the country itself. Although resembling in its general characteristics all the buildings of the same type, it is built with stones dug out of the soil of that country and adorned with flowers that bloom there. The inhabitants of Picardy are all the more attached to their cathedral at Amiens as they feel that it is truly Picardian. For a similar reason the



inhabitants of Champagne are attached to their cathedral at Rheims.

These decorative ornaments appear everywhere. The same reason which induced the artists to make use of the most humble flower, led them to work with the deepest love in the most remote and sometimes hidden part of the edifice; for them the eye of God is everywhere. We shall find and admire garlands of flowers in places where the eye can hardly penetrate; the loftiest capitals are minutely sculptured; everywhere the artist has put all his heart and all his skill into his work; in some cathedrals the same elaborate garlands can even be found under the old oak benches.

In addition to the flora, so beautiful and delicate, we find a fauna sometimes grotesque and even terrible. It is at this time that the gargoyles appear. The statues rest upon horrible monsters; but sometimes also we find representations, full of wit and good nature, in which the spirit of the time takes its course unhampered by convention. The same artists, who had to follow a strict rule when treating the history of God, could use all their imagination when treating the ornamental: whence the blossoming of the grotesque and the original. Sometimes we may think that such representations have little connection with the dignity and the sanctity of the edifice, but they are expressive of the Middle Ages. Christianity at that period admitted and tolerated any representation, for it embraced human nature as a whole, accepting even the jokes and tricks of a youthful imagination. The artists had the gaiety, the mirth, the mischief of childhood as they had its candor; there



CHAMPAGNE VINES: RHEIMS



was nothing immoral in them, and it is only in and after the fifteenth century that obscene representations appear.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Interpretation of the Mirror of Science*

IT WAS believed in the Middle Ages that, although man fell because Adam and Eve had fallen, yet he could rise again through his labor. Work was thus no longer considered as servitude, but as a means to freedom. Manual labor was as noble as intellectual work, for both were a means of redemption. Jesus had shown us the example by working. Most of the numerous saints had engaged in some kind of manual labor, of which they became the patrons and so we find corporations placing themselves under the protection of a patron saint.

We find here the reason why the various trades have such important places in the cathedral. We see them represented everywhere. On the main entrance they show us that they can lead us toward the city of God. In the lower part of the windows presented by corporations, they are represented with such precision in detail that it is possible for us to reconstruct the tools which were used at that time and the clothes which were characteristic of each trade. We see all the different trades of the period: the weaver, the baker, the butcher, the turner, but ahead of all, we see the field worker, because it is he who draws us nearer nature and perhaps also because at that time more people were engaged in this class of work than in any other occupation.



JUNE: PARIS



The months were represented on the main portal of the cathedral, as illustrated in the cathedrals of Paris, Chartres, Rheims, Amiens; they, too, glorify work. The people, especially the laborers, recognized in them the kind of work they had to perform in order to live and, since above these representations were the images of God, of the Virgin, and of the saints, they could understand that their work had a divine purpose.

At Chartres, Amiens, Paris we see:

January, the month of feast and rest, after Christmas and Epiphany—a man is seated beside a well-provided table;

February, it is cold and there is no more work in the field—a peasant is warming himself by the fire;

March, the peasant goes to his vineyard and spades it;

April, the most beautiful month in the year and sung by the *trouvères* as their choice—a youth with a wreath of fresh flowers and carrying ears of wheat in his hand, or a peasant working at his vine;

May, the month of riding and hunting, for the lords—at Chartres one sees a knight walking with a lance in his hand; in Amiens, a peasant resting under a tree, whereas in Paris he is making hay;

June, the time for reaping;

July, the time for harvesting;

August, laborers are getting in the harvest and beginning the threshing;

September, the time for vintage. In Amiens they gather their fruits;



October, sowing time. In Rheims they make wine;

November, they get ready for winter and gather dead branches and wood;

December is, like January, the period of rejoicing and resting.

The signs of the zodiac are sometimes represented together with the months. We see them on the pavement of some churches of Norman style, such as St. Remi at Rheims. At St. Denis, Suger, the king's minister, caused the different monthly occupations to be represented in mosaic in the basilica. The representation does not necessarily always begin with the same month, because, in the Middle Ages, the year began on different dates in the different regions. In Rheims, for example, it began on Annunciation day (25th of March); in Soissons, and likewise in Amiens, it was on Christmas day, since we see in the cathedral a calendar beginning with the month of December. It was Charles IX who, in 1564, set the beginning of the year on the first of January for all the kingdom of France.

Together with the representation of the month by the work done during that month, we see the animals associated with man, and helping him in his work. They are glorified. In Laon, for instance, near the top of the towers of the cathedral, we see sixteen big oxen where we might expect statues of saints. These figures remind us of the courageous animals who helped for years in the construction of the church, dragging the heavy stones up to the top of the hill where the cathedral was built. There is a legend that one day one of the oxen, exhausted



## MEDALLIONS AT AMIENS

PISCES

ARIES

FEBRUARY

MARCH



and unable to go further, stopped half way up the hill. This halt would have caused an accident, but suddenly another ox appeared and took the place of the exhausted one. Nobody knew how or whence he came.

Soon we see, besides manual work, intellectual work, and man rises above labor to pure science. The thirteenth century witnesses the development of the colleges. It is at that time that sciences were divided into two groups as we see these groups sculptured in the cathedral. The first group consisted of Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectics; the second of Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music. These represent about all the knowledge that man could acquire. Above them, as if it were their mother, towers Philosophy, and beyond, God's domain.

Grammar is sometimes represented with the features of a woman having at her feet a child intent on study. Sometimes she is represented with the features of a matronly woman carrying a ferule in her hand. Rhetoric is a woman whose garb is frequently adorned with flowers. Geometry has a table on which she works. Arithmetic counts balls in her hand. Astronomy carries a sphere or a curved instrument which is used to measure the stars. Dialectics has a serpent. Music is a woman who strikes bells. We see in that the legend which describes Tubal Cain discovering music by striking in succession different metals of different weights.

Surpassing all these sciences is Philosophy, often represented with the features of a woman dominating the others, carefully garbed, carrying books in one hand and a scepter in the other. Her

dress is adorned with a row of Greek letters, pi ( $\Pi$ ) along the lower edge, omega ( $\Omega$ ) along the upper edge. Linking the lower band with the upper is a ladder, symbolizing the scientific progress that man could make.

Under the figures representing these sciences we often see the men who were supposed to have taught them: Aristotle under Dialectics; Pythagoras under Arithmetic or Music; Cicero under Rhetoric; Ptolemy under Astronomy; Euclid under Geometry.

Sciences were not represented in all the cathedrals, but chiefly in those which were near flourishing schools: at Chartres, which possessed one of the most famous schools of the time where Fulbert taught, and which St. Ives and John of Salisbury conducted; at Laon, another famous school; at Auxerre was the school where Thomas of Canterbury stopped on his way back from Bologna and ended his studies; other schools were at Sens, at Clermont and at Paris. Unfortunately the representations of the sciences were mutilated in the cathedral of Paris in the eighteenth century.

If work is to be respected and honored the only gain which we shall derive from it is our salvation and not our glory. The work of him who envies the goods of this world will lead him to moral misery. This is explained to us in "the wheel of fortune." We see a reproduction of it on the southern portal of the cathedral of Amiens. It is a circle; on the left are pigmies mounting upward; at the very top sits a man, a scepter in his hand, a crown on his head. As soon as these little men have reached the one who represents the climax of riches and for-

tune, we see them climbing down, covered with rags, falling head first, as those whom glory and fortune have momentarily raised shall fall. The same representation is seen on the northern portal of the cathedral of Beauvais and in the miniatures of the Middle Ages.

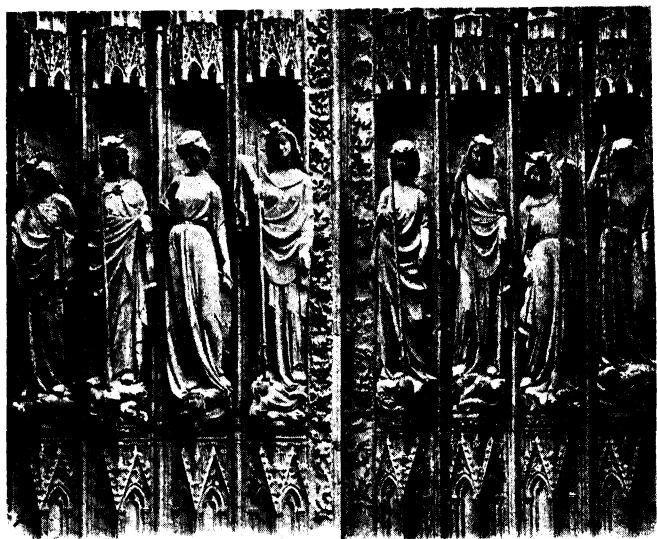
## CHAPTER IX

### *Interpretation of the Mirror of Morals*

**M**ORALS are represented by the virtues and vices, often placed on the main portal. In the first part of the thirteenth century the virtues are represented as striking down the vices, as at Strasbourg; they are beautiful women magnificently draped, with slender limbs which remind us of the nymphs of Goujon. They hold a lance which rests on the monster that they have just struck.

In the second part of the century the virtues are opposed to, and placed above, the vices. They have a calm and peaceful physiognomy. Vices are represented by scenes of discord to show clearly that if man wants to live peacefully and happily he must be virtuous. Virtue alone can better the soul and give peace. If we ignore virtue we shall find only fruitless and vain agitation. Virtues are represented in quatrefoils at Paris, Chartres, and Amiens, in practically the same way and opposed to vices.

1. (a) Faith: a woman holding an escutcheon with a cross or a chalice.  
(b) Idolatry: a man kneeling before a master.
2. (a) Hope: a woman with gonfalon standard stretching out her arm to reach a distant crown, or wreath of glory.  
(b) Despair: sometimes a woman, sometimes a man ending his life with a dagger.



THE VIRTUES

THE VICES

AT STRASBOURG





COWARDICE: PARIS

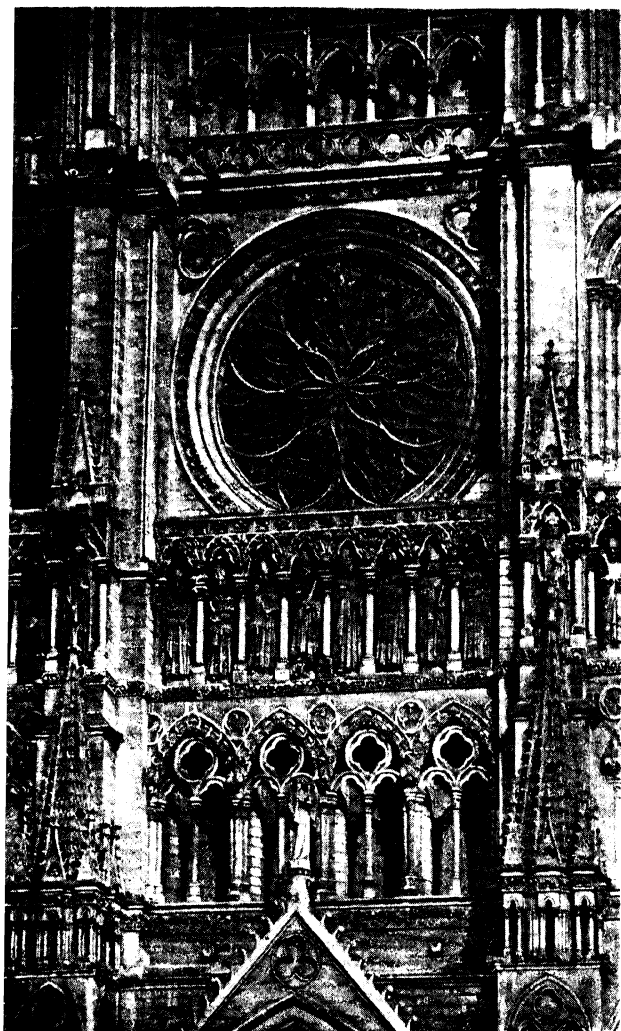
3. (a) Charity: a woman bearing a shield with a ewe on it. The ewe gives its flesh, fleece, milk; or sometimes a woman giving away her coat. The mediæval artist is not subtle enough to make a distinction between charity and alms.  
 (b) Avarice: a woman who hoards her treasures in a casket.
4. (a) Courtesy: a woman holding a shield with an ox or a lamb on it.  
 (b) Churlishness: a woman kicking over her cupbearer.
5. (a) Courage: a warrior bearing a shield on which is represented either a lion or a leopard.  
 (b) Cowardice: a knight running away, afraid of a hare.
6. (a) Patience: a woman carrying a shield on which is an ox, because the ox was considered slow and patient.  
 (b) Anger: a woman stabbing a man with a sword (Chartres and Amiens), or a man who, sword in hand, walks against an unmoved monk (Paris).
7. (a) Concord or Love: the divine, not human love. Her shield bears a tree with many branches grafted on its stem.  
 (b) Discord: a wife and husband quarreling.
8. (a) Obedience: a shield bearing a camel.  
 (b) Rebellion: a man snapping his fingers at his bishop.
9. (a) Perseverance: a shield with the crown which will be given to those who have always followed the precepts of Jesus.

- (b) Inconstancy: a monk running away from his monastery and throwing off his cowl and gown.
- 10. (a) Chastity: a salamander or a phoenix; either animal was believed to live in flame.
  - (b) Lust: a woman who admires herself in a mirror (Paris); or a young man kissing a young girl who holds a mirror in her hand (Chartres and Amiens).
- 11. (a) Wisdom: a snake. St. Matthew X:16, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents."
  - (b) Folly: a man eating, and walking with a club, which later will be shorter and become the jester's mace.
- 12. (a) Humility: a shield with a dove.
  - (b) Pride: a man falling from his horse.

Since the purpose of all these symbols was answered sufficiently if their sign was understood they were entrusted to inferior workmen. The choice of these virtues was not in conformity with the divisions adopted by the theologians. Yet it is most interesting to observe that the man who made a list of them was a true Christian, for he has given the highest place to the most humble, the most hidden virtues: humility, obedience, perseverance. Preoccupied with the deep life of the soul he has not even thought of representing a social virtue like justice.



CHASTITY AND LUST: AMIENS



GALLERY OF THE KINGS AT AMIENS

## CHAPTER X

### *Interpretation of the Mirror of History*

**T**HE artists of the Middle Ages see everywhere the finger of God; it is symbolically represented by a hand emerging from the clouds. They are sure that God rules everything on earth; He sends war, peace, plagues.

History is, before all else, His history. Great importance is given to the interpretations of the Old and New Testaments, to the Apocrypha, and to the Last Judgment, but they hardly mention the history of their time or ancient history.

**Interpretation of the History of the Time.** Clovis, Charlemagne, St. Louis are sometimes represented, but only as servants of God and in the episodes of their life which are related to Him. It is thus that we see at Rheims the baptism of Clovis, an event which was of great importance to the Church; at Chartres on a window we see the valiant deeds of Charlemagne, who fought for his religion; sometimes we also see episodes from the Crusades.

The gallery, which is sometimes called the "Gallery of the Kings of France," and which can be seen on the main porch of most of our cathedrals, does not represent, as some people have thought, the kings of France, but the ancestors of Jesus Christ. This is in conformity with the Old Testament, where it is said that Christ should be born from a long line of kings. Their number is

not always the same; it depends on whether the artist traces the ancestry of Jesus to Jesse or to Adam, as St. Luke did.

**Interpretation of Ancient History.** In the interpretation of the sciences, we saw how some of the famous men of antiquity were represented. In history, Aristotle appears only at Lyons in the following incident: His pupil, Alexander, was in love; Aristotle blamed him, but he, in turn, saw the beautiful young girl and fell in love with her. The artist, therefore, represents Aristotle subjugated. This is shown by the fact that the girl is driving him in a leash, brandishing a whip and seated astride the back of Aristotle, who walks on all fours.

We can see the representation of a few fables from Æsop which the preachers related sometimes in their sermons. The sibyls were well known to people, especially at the end of the fifteenth century. People believed that sibyls had foreseen the coming of Jesus. There are sibyls sculptured in the Cathedrals of Laon and of Auxerre; on a more recent fresco painted on the walls of a chapel in the cathedral of Amiens; and in the Pope's palace at Avignon, where the sibyl faces the prophets.

**Interpretation of the Old Testament.** It is especially on the windows that scenes taken from the Old Testament are represented, in Chartres, Le Mans, Tours, Lyon. In the Sainte Chapelle of Paris eleven big windows, some of them made up of one hundred panels, represent different episodes of the history of the people of God. At Amiens, scenes from the Old Testament are seen on the medallions of the west door. Patriarchs and prophets with the







THE PROPHETS: STRASBOURG

apostles, who are standing on each side of Christ at the main entrance, occupy the most conspicuous place. The people knew these scenes well; every year, at the periods of Christmas and Epiphany, they saw them in the mysteries which were enacted for their education under the direction of the clergy. The actors were garbed in long robes, had long white beards, walked slowly, one after the other, up and down the cathedral, each personifying a prophet. The onlookers, who, from their earliest childhood to their death, would watch these ceremonies, became quite familiar with the names, the attributes, and the history of the characters represented. In those days religion, drama, and art had the same aim and sought to provoke the same thoughts. They did not pretend to amuse the people; they endeavored to teach them.

The prophets are represented with a band or a scroll on which some of their prophecies are written. Under their statue is often a bas-relief showing some of their predictions. The sacrifice of Abraham, the tree of Jesse, the history of David and that of Joseph, are frequently represented, together with scenes of the Old Testament which parallel scenes of the New Testament, for the Middle Ages understood the Old Testament only in connection with the New.

The significance of the Old Testament is veiled; Jesus, by his death, tears this veil asunder; Light appears and illumines the facts that could not be understood before. This is the influence of scholasticism which links together the different episodes of the two books. Comparing Adam with Christ it would say: Even as Adam was created on the sixth

day, so was Christ born in the sixth age of the world. The former was destroyed through his sin, the latter saved us by his death. The Middle Ages believed that the cross of the Saviour had been made out of the tree of Paradise, and so they would often represent Adam at the foot of the cross. Noah represents Jesus; his ark, the church of Jesus; the ark, made of wood just as was the cross of Jesus, was built by Noah, the only just man of that time, as the Church was built by Jesus Christ, The Very Just. The ark floated upon the waters to show how the Church would find her salvation in the waters of baptism. Noah first sent out a raven which did not return, then a dove which did return. The raven is the symbol of the sinner who abandons the Church, whereas the dove is the symbol of the just who always return to Jesus.

Moses is the symbol of Christ; he brings the law of God to the Jews, as Jesus brought it to us later. We see how the Christians of that time were always looking for Christ and saw Him everywhere. The history of Jonah symbolizes the resurrection. He is sometimes represented at the side of Jesus coming out of the tomb, as at Lyons, Le Mans and Bourges: even as Jonah stayed three days in the belly of the whale so will the Son of Man stay three days in the bosom of the earth. The history of Samson, at Chartres, is also a symbol of resurrection: even as Samson regained his strength and broke the gates of his prison, so will Christ find life again and break the gates of the sepulchre. Abraham gives a tenth of his goods to Melchizedek, who in exchange gives him bread and wine: scholasticism sees in that a symbol of



ADAM AND EVE: RHEIMS



the Eucharist. This way of thinking and reasoning takes sometimes a very subtle turn. In these interpretations the different scenes are placed, now side by side, now one above the other.

In the Bible we read of Jesse's tree at the top of which a flower was to blossom. For the Middle Ages this flower is the symbol of Jesus, and the tree is represented in the form of a genealogical tree growing out of the stomach of Jesse, asleep on the ground; in the branches are the kings of Judah and on top of the highest branch is the Virgin with Jesus above her.

On the voussairs at Chartres, Laon, Amiens; on the windows at Chartres, St. Denis, and in the Ste. Chapelle in Paris, Christ is represented surrounded by the seven doves which represent the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.

**Interpretation of the New Testament.** The scenes represented most often are the Nativity, the Ascension of our Saviour, a few episodes of His public life and the lives of the saints. It seems quite natural that scenes of the birth and death of Jesus should occur with greatest frequency. The people saw them acted in the mysteries every year at Christmas and at Easter. Knowing these episodes better than the others, they would reproduce them more often. At first the number of the wise men was not limited; the Bible mentions neither their number nor their names. Little by little the imagination of the people pictured them as kings and always represented them in the same way. Melchior, a white-haired and heavily bearded old man, offers Jesus some gold which is symbolic of royalty; it shows that Jesus is the King of the

World. Balthazar, who is represented in the prime of life, with a dark complexion and a beard, offers the myrtle; this means that the Son of Man must die. Gaspar, a beardless youth, offers incense, a symbol of divinity. Later, towards the fourteenth century, Balthazar was represented with the face of a black man. The age of each wise man symbolizes the worship that all men, young or old, must offer to Jesus. The Three Kings symbolize also the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japhet—consequently the three human races, or the whole world coming to worship God.

In the representation of the nativity, we always see the shepherds, the ox, the ass and the star. This star is sometimes carried by an angel, and it often encloses the head of a child-angel who, in the popular imagination, was the very same angel that had announced the birth of the Saviour to the shepherds.

The public life of Jesus is seldom interpreted in the Middle Ages, although we sometimes see the baptism of Jesus, the nuptial feast of Cana, in which the husband is St. John; Jesus among the doctors, the temptation, and the transfiguration.

The Church had shown to the people only a few incidents in the life of Jesus, which were celebrated on certain feast days, but not so often represented as incidents of the lives of the saints. On the contrary His death was frequently shown. We notice that His wound is placed in His right side for this reason: on the window Christ is represented on the cross, two women standing by Him. One is the Church, the other is the Synagogue. The Church, placed at His right, because the right is considered



THE NATIVITY AT CHARTRES





the most desirable place, receives His blood; it was therefore necessary that the wound through which the blood escaped should be in His right side; the Synagogue, represented blindfolded because she was not able to see the celestial light, is at His left and turns away from Him, as we see on a window of Bourges.

Sometimes Mary and John are at the foot of the cross. Mary symbolizes the Church because she is the only one who never doubted. At Rouen, on the window representing the scene of the crucifixion, we see the Church at the side of Mary and the Synagogue at the side of St. John.

**Interpretation of the Life of the Virgin.** The people of the Middle Ages wanted to know more about the Virgin; hence the legends concerning her family, her childhood, her marriage, her death. After Jesus, she has the highest place, as is shown by the name of Notre Dame given to many churches. A portal is often dedicated to her as well as the principal chapel of the apse. The religious orders created at that time, the Franciscans, and the Benedictines, diffused her creed. A special prayer to her, called "The Angelus," was recited in the thirteenth century. The Virgin came to be considered as the dawn preceding the Sun of Justice; as the mediator between God and man; as the Queen of heaven, where she sits on a throne among the angels; of earth, where she frequently reveals her power; of hell, where she is all-powerful over the demons. For that reason she is always represented with a crown on her head and a scepter in her hand. The Middle Ages often compared her to Eve, or Eva. It seems that a proof of the likeness

between Mary and Eva was found in the very name of Eva, which is formed with the same letters, in reverse order as the word "Ave," which was the first word of the Angelic Salutation: Ave Maria. Later, when the miracles and the apparitions attributed to her had, so to speak, brought her nearer to us, she is represented radiating maternal love, a mother before being a queen, and finally rendered more human still through her suffering as Mater Dolorosa.

The life of the Virgin is painted on the windows of most of our cathedrals. We sometimes see episodes of the life of her parents, Saint Anne and Saint Joachim; then her marriage, the annunciation, her visit to St. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist; her death, her assumption, the crowning of Mary by her Son; in the representation of the last judgment she is seen imploring Him to have mercy upon men.

**Interpretation of the Lives of the Saints.** The saints outshine the kings and emperors. Other men, when represented beside them, appear as small as children, to show the superiority of the saints by contrast. One of the most famous books of the Middle Ages was the Golden Legend, written by Jacques de Voragine. That book, which relates the lives of the saints, was read everywhere, in monasteries, castles, private homes. Jacques de Voragine lived from 1230 to 1298. The manuscript copies of his book, which were already abundant in the Middle Ages, became more numerous with the invention of printing. The book, which was to be universally read, was in great demand, and in 1500 there were seventy-four editions of it, and thirty translations



PORTAL OF THE VIRGIN AT AMIENS CATHEDRAL  
SOUTH TRANSEPT



SOUTH DOOR OF NOTRE DAME: PARIS

*Upper part:* St. Martin as a soldier giving the beggar half of his cloak.

*Lower part:* St. Louis, king of France, holding the crown of thorns;

St. Martin as Bishop of Tours; and A Prophet.

in different languages, the book itself having been originally written in Latin. William Caxton published it in 1493. It is easy to understand the effect that these legends and this book had on the minds of the men of the Middle Ages. It is the best guide to the understanding of the many legends interpreted on the stones of our cathedrals. The saints were at the same time examples for the living, intercessors before God, and patrons. Each diocese of France had its saints whom it honored, and some of these saints, such as St. Martin, are known throughout France and even throughout the world.

When a newly-born child was baptized he would receive the name of a saint, who would be his patron; as the boy grew up he would choose a trade and join a corporation; a new saint would then protect him, for each corporation had its saint, whose feast was celebrated with great pomp: St. Aime protected the joiners and the cooks; St. Christopher, the porters; St. Nicholas, the confectioners; St. Thomas, the architects; St. Fiacre, the gardeners; St. Eloi, the goldsmiths; St. Cecilia, the musicians; St. Martha, the servants. The pin-makers celebrated the Nativity, because they thought the pins were absolutely necessary to clothe a new-born baby; the perfume dealers, Mary Magdalena, because of the perfumes which she poured on the feet of Jesus; the inn-keepers, St. Julian, who offered a shelter even to those who were plague-stricken. Each day of the year was dedicated to a saint, and some of the days were, and still are, occasions for great festivities, such as St. John the Baptist's day in Picardy; those of St. Anne d'Auray and St. Yves in Brittany.

Some of the saints' days indicate the seasons. St. Valentine's feast marks the beginning of spring; on that day the birds were supposed to find their mates, and he who was in love could declare his love and woo; that of St. John the Baptist marks the summer; of St. Lew marks the return of short days, autumn and winter.

In each region there were sacred places, sanctified by the passage of a saint or by relics which were religiously kept there. France is indeed a vast sanctuary.

One would pray to the saints for protection against illness and as a guide in various important actions of life. St. Roch protects from the plague; St. Hubert, from rabies; St. Claire, from eye disease; St. Christopher, from sudden death; the statue of the latter is often for that reason found at the very entrance of the cathedral, in order that when entering the building, the worshipper cannot fail to see him, and he will feel that he is safe from sudden death during the day. French people still believe in the protection of this saint, who has thus become the patron saint of the aviators and automobilists.

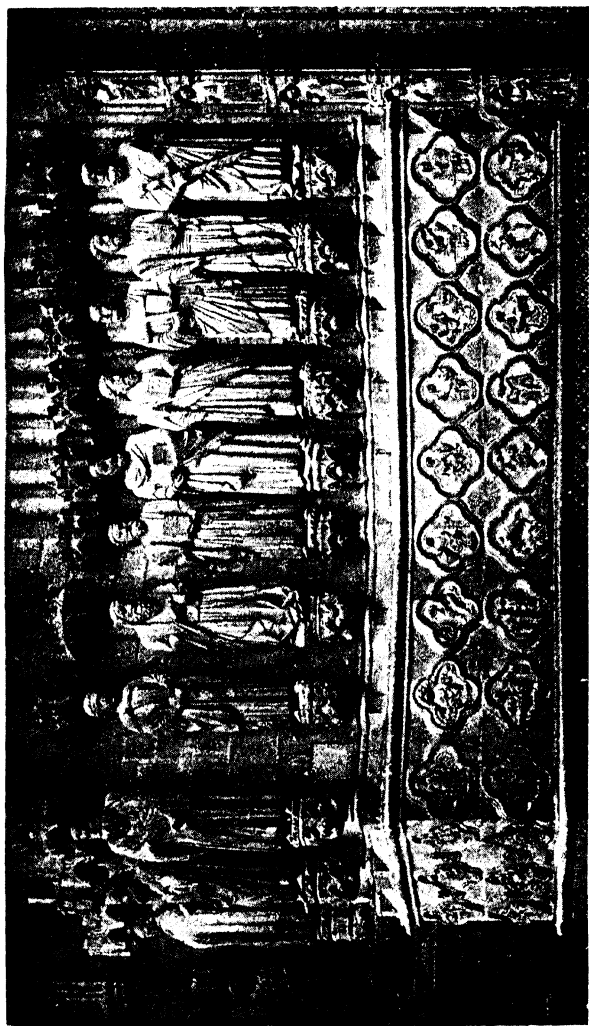
St. Catherine, whose feast is on the 25th of November, is the patron of the young maidens; St. Nicholas, the 6th of December, of the boys; St. Barbe, the 4th of December, of the married women. Their feast days are still popular in France. St. Cornelius protects the horned cattle; St. Anthony, always represented with a pig, is the protector of the swine.

Since a special virtue is attached to the saints they are always represented carrying the symbols



ST. CHRISTOPHER: AMIENS





THE APOSTLES: AMIENS

of that virtue, and also by attributes peculiar to each saint: St. George is courage; St. John, contemplation; St. Jerome, science; St. Anthony has his pig; St. Roch, his dog; St. Eloi, his blacksmith's tongs.

If they are apostles they are represented in the main portal of the cathedral at the side of Christ. Peter, with kinky hair, a short and heavy beard, a tonsured crown, carries the keys of paradise. St. Paul, bald and with a long beard, and who, as a Roman citizen, had his head cut off with a sword, carries a sword. St. Andrew, because he was crucified, carries his cross. St. James the Lesser, who was felled to the ground at the gates of the temple of Jerusalem, carries a club. St. John, because of the poison which he had to drink and which did not kill him, carries a cup out of which emerges a snake. St. James carries the sea shells of the pilgrims, and sometimes a sword. St. Bartholomew, flayed alive, carries a dagger. St. Thomas, because of the temple he was to build, has a square rule in his hand. St. Philip and St. Matthew have a book or a sword. St. Simon holds a book. St. Mathias, the apostle who took the place of Judas, carries a hatchet or a sword.

Besides the saints who are generally represented throughout the country, some are shown in the particular locality where they lived, and we may call them local saints for that reason.

**Local Saints.** In the cathedral of Amiens and in many other cathedrals the left portal of the façade is consecrated to the saints of Picardy, of whom the principal one is St. Firmin, who was the first bishop of Amiens. The southern portal repre-

sents the life of St. Honoré, another bishop. At Rheims the northern portal represents St. Sixte, the first bishop, and with him are the saints of the diocese; in Bourges, two portals, and at Chartres the stained glass windows and statues are consecrated to local saints; at Paris are represented St. Denis, St. Genevieve, and St. Marcel; at Rouen the legend of St. Romain and of St. Ouen; in Soissons, those of St. Crepin and St. Crepinien; in Tours that of St. Martin; in Lyons, St. Pothin, St. Irene, St. Polycarpe. These local saints were nearer to the men of the earlier times, who had heard about their lives; they seem to be a living proof that it is possible to reach heaven, and they serve likewise as examples; the people had more love and veneration for them because they felt that the saints belonged to them; they were proud of them and liked to find in their cathedral the glorious past of their country.

With the saints of the diocese, those whose relics were in the churches were also represented. Chartres possessed the head of St. Anne; Amiens, the head of St. John the Baptist; Sens, the cape and mitre of St. Thomas à Becket.

The patrons of the guilds, the members of which had donated stained glass windows to the church, were also represented. In such cases the main part of the window shows the life of the saint, and the lower part the donors themselves. If an individual offered a window to the church, that window generally represented the life of the saint whose name the donor bore or whom he venerated for some particular reason. Those most frequently represented are St. James, St. Nicholas, and St.



ST. FIRMIN: AMIENS



LOCAL SAINTS: AMIENS

Martin, and immediately after them, St. George, St. Anthony and St. Christopher. St. James was very popular through the many pilgrimages made at that time to the shrine of St. James of Compostella in Spain. One of the first of these pilgrims had been the Emperor Charlemagne. A legend says that he reached that town following all the time the direction of the Milky Way, which has since been called the "Way of St. James." Later on, as the number of the pilgrims increased, roads were built and along these roads, inns and shelters. Those who had been to Compostella were eligible to the brotherhood of St. James, which was at that time very famous in France. Whether St. James be represented in the company of the apostles or not, he always carries the sea shells of the pilgrim.

St. Nicholas, the great thaumaturgist of the East, was represented nearly everywhere. It was he whom one invoked in case of imminent dangers; a great number of miracles were attributed to him. St. Martin was just as popular. We find him in all the churches, and represented several times in the same church, seven times in the cathedral of Chartres. Before setting out on a long journey, the knight or the pilgrim nailed at his door a horse shoe in honor of St. Martin, and called upon this saint to protect him and his family during his absence. No one, then, would have dared to harm his family or his property, and this legend may account for the idea of the horse shoe bringing luck. On his return the pilgrim would make an offering to the saint.

We have already mentioned the representation of St. Christopher. St. Anthony was always seen

with his pig. In the twelfth century, an order was created and placed under the protection of St. Anthony and called after him "the Antonines." The members devoted their lives to the sick and the pilgrims. When an edict forbade swine to wander at random, an exception was made for that order, so that their swine might look for their food everywhere; their animals could always be recognized by little bells attached to their necks. This is why St. Anthony was represented accompanied by a pig.

The lives of these saints were known by all the people of the Middle Ages. Then centuries elapsed. Men forgot. But Frenchmen, old and young, have kept in their memory the legends of their popular saints. Two of these follow:

**Legend of St. Martin.** Near the place where the cathedral of Amiens now stands, stood the ancient Roman gate of the Twins, where Remus and Romulus were represented as being suckled by the wolf. In the year 337, on a winter day, when men were dying from cold in the streets of Samarobriva, the ancient name of the town now called Amiens, there rode out of that gate a Roman soldier, wrapped in his horseman's cloak. The soldier, named Martin, had scarcely gone out of the city when he was met by a naked beggar shivering with the cold. The soldier, wishing to shelter the poor man and seeing no other way to do so, drew his sword, and cutting his cloak in two, gave half of it to the beggar.

Back in his quarters, Martin was accused of having inconsiderately disposed of a cloak which was army property, and was punished accord-



ST. MARTIN DIVIDING HIS CLOAK WITH THE  
BEGGAR: AIX





ingly: for eight days he was to go out without a coat.

That same night he saw in a dream the Lord Jesus, among the angels, bearing on His shoulders the half cloak which he had given to the beggar. He heard Jesus say: "Martin, you shall go out but not suffer, for the sun shall shine and flowers shall blossom."

The next day and for eight days the weather was fine, the sun shone, and Martin went out, and did not suffer. It was November, but it seemed like summer. As if the Lord wanted to remind men of Martin's act of charity, there has always been since that time a period of very fine weather from the eleventh to the nineteenth of November, which the French call Saint Martin's Summer.

Soon after this vision Martin hastened to receive baptism, being then in his twenty-third year. Converted and baptized, Martin determined not to fight any more. He asked for his dismissal from the army, saying, "I am a soldier of Christ, therefore not permitted to go to war any longer." The Emperor Julian accused him of cowardice. Thereupon Martin proposed to lead his army into battle, armed only with the cross. The Emperor accepted. On the very day he was to send Martin to the fray the enemy sent emissaries offering submission and peace. Martin left the army and became bishop of Tours. He died at the age of eighty-one years.

The people of Poitiers and of Tours came to his funeral. Those from Poitiers said: "He was a monk once in our city. We must have him and bury him there." Those from Tours said: "God made him come to Tours and gave him to us; we shall have

him, and he will rest in our city forever." During the night, while the people from Poitiers were asleep, the people from Tours took his body, placed him on a barge and carried him back to their city and buried him.

Severin, the bishop of Cologne, was praying in his church when St. Martin died. He called one of the priests kneeling near him and said: "I hear the angels sing; they are taking Martin, who has just died, to heaven." The priest, having noted the exact day and time, discovered later that it was at that very moment that Martin had breathed his last.

No one had ever seen anger, sadness, or cheerfulness in Saint Martin; there was nothing in his heart but piety to God and pity for men. This shows the roots of St. Martin's extraordinary and universal power over Christendom and the particular reverence which the French have always had for him.

A few hundred yards south of the Cathedral of Amiens on the northern front of the court of Justice, untouched by the shells and bombs of the last war, one can read on a memorial tablet erected where the cloak incident took place:

*"Chy Saint Martin divisa son mantel*

*En l'An trois cents ajoutez trente-sept."*

**Legend of Saint Christopher.** There was once a man named Christopher who came from the land of Canaan. He was a giant and his aspect was terrible. He decided to go and serve the most powerful man in the world. He went to a great king reputed to be the most powerful. The king greeted Christopher and made him a member of his court.

One evening a jester sang. The name of the devil occurred several times in the song. Each time the king made the sign of the cross on his forehead. It surprised Christopher. The king explained that he was afraid of the devil and wanted to keep him away. Christopher realized he was not in the service of the most powerful man since the man was afraid. He left the king in quest of the devil.

Crossing the desert he met a strange and fierce-looking man who asked him where he went. Christopher told him. The fierce-looking man said he was the devil, and would be glad to have Christopher in his service. They marched on together. They came to a cross erected where two roads met. The devil fled. Christopher followed him and, overtaking him, asked for an explanation. "Every time I see a cross it reminds me of Christ's death and fear seizes me," said the devil. Christopher decided to leave him and go in quest of Christ.

He met a hermit and explained what he was looking for. The old man told him it would be hard to find Christ, but that if he behaved well he could perhaps succeed. "Not far from here is a river. Many who attempt to cross it perish. Go there. Guide and help the travelers. You are tall and strong. You can do it. Christ will be pleased and will reward you." Christopher departed and built a hut on the bank of the river. Leaning on a huge stick he helped all those who presented themselves to cross. One day a child asked him for help. Christopher carried him on his shoulders. Soon he found that the water was rising and, as

he was gradually sinking, he became frightened. Nevertheless, he reached the other bank. Then he remarked, "It seemed to me that I was carrying the world, so great was your weight, my child." And the child answered: "Be not surprised, Christopher, for not only hast thou carried the world but the one who made it; I am Christ. I will prove it; plant thy stick here in the sand and tomorrow it shall be covered with leaves and flowers." The next day the stick was covered with leaves and flowers.

Then Christopher started on his mission: to convert men.

He met with great dangers but miracles saved him. One day he saw Christians being tormented. He approached them, spoke to them, exhorted them to courage. He was arrested. The soldiers took him to the king who asked him to change his religion. Christopher refused and was beaten. The king ordered the soldiers to torture Christopher and to put him to death. He was tied to a stake and four hundred arrows were shot at him. The arrows remained in the air and none touched him. The king laughed at him and derided him; an arrow pierced the king's eye. Christopher, seeing his suffering, said: "The end of my life is near. Tomorrow, tyrant, you shall bathe your eye with my blood and you will see with both eyes again."

Christopher was executed.

Having bathed his eye with his victim's blood, the king recovered his sight. Believing in the miracle, the king ordered that any one who blasphemed against God or Christopher should be put to death.

**The Apocrypha.** The imagination of the people and sometimes also their peculiar interpretation of certain sculptured representations gave birth to the Apocrypha. Thus in the case of St. Anthony and his pig, people forgot the real reason for that representation and imagined that the hermit had always lived in solitude with the animal as his only companion. Likewise St. Nicholas, who delivered three Christian knights unjustly condemned to death and shut in a tower, was depicted as an extraordinarily large man, according to the custom of regarding saints as more powerful than ordinary men, while the knights and the tower were very small. Those who did not know history took the small knights to be young children, and the tower a sort of pantry. Hence originated the legend of St. Nicholas. St. Elms or Erasmus was the patron saint of the Mediterranean Sea. He was often represented with his hand on the wheel of a capstan, surrounded with cables. The land dwellers who did not know these sea objects saw in the capstan the wheel on which he was martyred, and in the cables his entrails. This is the reason that St. Elms was invoked in cases of abdominal trouble. Some saints who had been decapitated were represented carrying their heads in their hands. The people, forgetting that it was their torture that was represented, thought that the saints had walked after they had been decapitated. Thus we may see how from an historical event was born an artistic representation, which was the source of the Apocrypha.

Many of these legends are about the Virgin and the Holy Family. We have already seen how the

adoration of the wise men and the sovereignty of the Virgin were represented. Besides these there are many other legends in which the popular imagination had free scope, and which were represented in the "Mysteries," such as the legend of St. Theophile.

The death of Cain represented at Lyons, Bourges, Auxerre, and on a window of the Ste. Chapelle in Paris is an apocryphal narrative of the Old Testament. Lamech, a blind man, was supposed to have gone hunting guided by a child, Tubal Cain. The child, thinking he had seen a wild beast in a bush, told Lamech, who, pointing his bow in the direction of the bush, killed Cain who was hidden there. Discovering his crime, Lamech was enraged and killed the child.

**Interpretation of the Last Judgment.** Through the religious books everybody knew when and how the Last Judgment would come. It is represented as a sort of vast drama divided into five acts, which we find on the western side of our cathedrals.

It is to come at midnight, after we have been warned by various signs. At first God, inexorable, shows His wounds. All the instruments of His death are near Him. Sometimes the Virgin and St. John, kneeling beside Him, implore Him to have mercy upon man.

Angels sent by Him, blow the trumpets. At that sound all the dead awake. They are not the same age as when they died but they are all thirty-three years old, the age of strength, the age Jesus was when he died. They lift the stones of their tombs, and somewhat dazzled by the eternal light, open their eyes. They are naked, or barely covered







SOULS BEING CARRIED AWAY BY THE ANGELS: RHEIMS

with their shrouds. Sometimes they carry crowns or sceptres, showing their rank, but appearing together, all equal, at the last call. St. Michael, holding a pair of scales, weighs all the actions, good or bad. In one of the plates is a little angel, or a small praying figure, symbolizing good deeds. In the other plate is a hideous creature, a symbol of sin. St. Michael is the angel of death; it is he who presides always over the Last Judgment; all the cemetery chapels were consecrated to him and sometimes we see him carved on the tombstones. At his right the angels lead the just; at his left the evil-doers, chained, are led by hideous demons. The angels carry garlands of flowers and crowns. The just, clad in long robes, are calm and composed; the evil-doers are often naked and their faces show their torment. Popular malice would have the line of evil-doers begin with a bishop and end with a knight; sometimes in a sense of equality, sometimes also in vengeance. In front of the just is the threshold of eternity represented by a gate. St. Peter is there, keys in hand. The idea of the artist was to remind us that the Church alone, represented by St. Peter, could open the gates of the celestial kingdom. Sometimes, in Bourges, Rheims, and Amiens we see the patriarch Abraham, who, seated on his throne, holds in his lap the souls of the just, in the form of tiny beings. The sculptors seem to have been unable satisfactorily to represent Paradise, the abode of light, harmony, and beauty. They tried to express it through the holy calm which is seen on the faces of the elect.

In front of the evil-doers is Hell, represented

by an enormous mouth spouting flames. While some of the demons seem to be fairly good-natured, others have hideous faces, and, armed with forks, try to push the damned souls into the gaping jaws.



THE LAST JUDGMENT: RHEIMS



## *Conclusion*

TO APPRECIATE its grandeur, as well as its real meaning, it seems necessary to compare the art of the Middle Ages with the art of the following centuries, of the sixteenth and seventeenth. On one side we have a national, on the other an imported, art. In the thirteenth century the rich and the poor have the same artistic joys, which they express on the stones of their cathedral. It becomes the history of France and also the history of science and art. Each cathedral, in itself, is not vast enough to form a complete encyclopedia; but all the French cathedrals make a perfect book.

Paris is the church of the Virgin. Four portals out of six are dedicated to her. The Virgin is the center, the pivot, and the church bears her name: Notre Dame.

Bourges is the church of the Saints. The windows illustrate their lives: the Golden Legend.

Amiens is the church of the Prophets. They appear on its front and seem to look into the future.

Rheims is the church of the Nation. The baptism of Clovis, one of the first Frankish Kings and the first Christian King, is represented. The Kings of France who were crowned there are painted on the windows of the nave.

In these cathedrals we learn that our own history co-exists with the history of the universe. Our life must be a continuous struggle; all the year we must fight against nature, all our life we must fight

against ourselves. We feel it when we are in the Cathedral, but how much more deeply the men of the Middle Ages must have felt it! For them the Cathedral was, as it should be for us, a symbol of love and faith, a sacrament.

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